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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6013  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0571  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 001388

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ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN RUN-OFF: OBSERVERS SEE CONTINUED  
PROGRESS TOWARDS A RETURN TO DEMOCRACY

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 1365  
[B.](#) NOUAKCHOTT 1378  
[C.](#) NOUAKCHOTT 1386

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(U) SUMMARY  
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-- International and national election observers believe the December 3 second round elections were well run and represent an improvement over the November 19 polls.

-- Observers credit this to the experience gained during the November polls, the single ballots, and the additional training received by poll watchers and election officials during the interim.

-- Despite improvements to an already very good process, additional efforts are needed to clarify and relax the standards under which a ballot is invalidated, enhance the role of the electoral commission, and provide additional voter education.

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(SBU) COMMENTS  
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-- These elections represent the most significant hurdle the ruling Military Council has faced in implementing its democratic transition plan, and it appears the Council has once again demonstrated its commitment to that plan.

-- It is clear that election officials, from poll workers on up, placed the need for perfectly clear and honest elections as their top concern. This in turn limited to a small degree some Mauritians' ability to have their vote counted, a valid issue that needs to be addressed in future elections, but does not take away from the resounding success of these elections.

End Summary and Comments.

[1.](#) (U) Mauritania completed a second round of legislative elections December 3 to decide the remaining 52 National Assembly seats not won during the November 19 first round polls (ref B). Post sent out nine observation teams of U.S. and Mauritanian personnel to track the process and compare findings with the November 19 polls. Post will analyze the results of the elections septel.

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CONTINUED ELECTORAL PROGRESS  
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¶2. (U) Post's observation teams, as well as international observers from the EU, UN, African Union, the Francophonie organization, Arab League, and NDI, as well as the national observers' organization, concur that these second round elections were an improvement over the November 19 polls, which all agreed had been well executed (ref A). Observers reported an improved flow of voters through the polling station, as well as enhanced voter awareness of the voting procedures. Poll workers were more efficient, both in processing voters, as well as in counting ballots after voting had ended.

¶3. (U) Observers noted that poll workers were "scrupulous" in counting ballots, closely following the stringent guidelines for designating ballots as either valid or invalid. These guidelines call for poll workers to disregard voter intent and invalidate ballots on which voters made the slightest of mistakes. At the same time, observers did see some differences in interpretation of the guidelines. While this standard may need to be adjusted to reduce the rate of invalidated ballots, poll workers did their best to follow the standard diligently.

¶4. (U) Observers credited the procedural improvements to the experience gained during the November 19 polls and additional training received by poll watchers and election officials during the interim. In a majority of polling stations observed, the polling staff had not changed, and voters were

NOUAKCHOTT 00001388 002 OF 002

able to return to the same polling stations they had visited on November 19. As such, poll workers and voters knew what to expect, and how best to fulfill their respective roles.

¶5. (U) As was the case on November 19, candidate representatives closely monitored the process. Representatives repeatedly credited the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with having offered extensive poll watcher training.

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NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS  
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¶6. (U) Additional improvements need to be made to clarify and relax the standards under which a ballot is invalidated, enhance the electoral reporting template, and condense the instructions for poll workers to make the process easier to follow. Additionally, observers agree that the role of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) needs to be enhanced. Additional voter education also remains critical.

¶7. (U) The UN will sponsor a meeting with all election observation teams on December 7 to discuss findings, after which it will undertake working level discussions with GIRM officials aimed at securing those changes.  
Twining